

HOW I DO IT

Emergency Tracheostomy for Advanced Head and Neck Tumor

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Many surgeons are challenged by patients presenting with upper airway obstructive symptoms due to compressive advanced head and neck tumors when emergency tracheostomy is indicated. Tumor bulk displaces the trachea and surrounding structures from their normal anatomy, making an emergency tracheostomy difficult in

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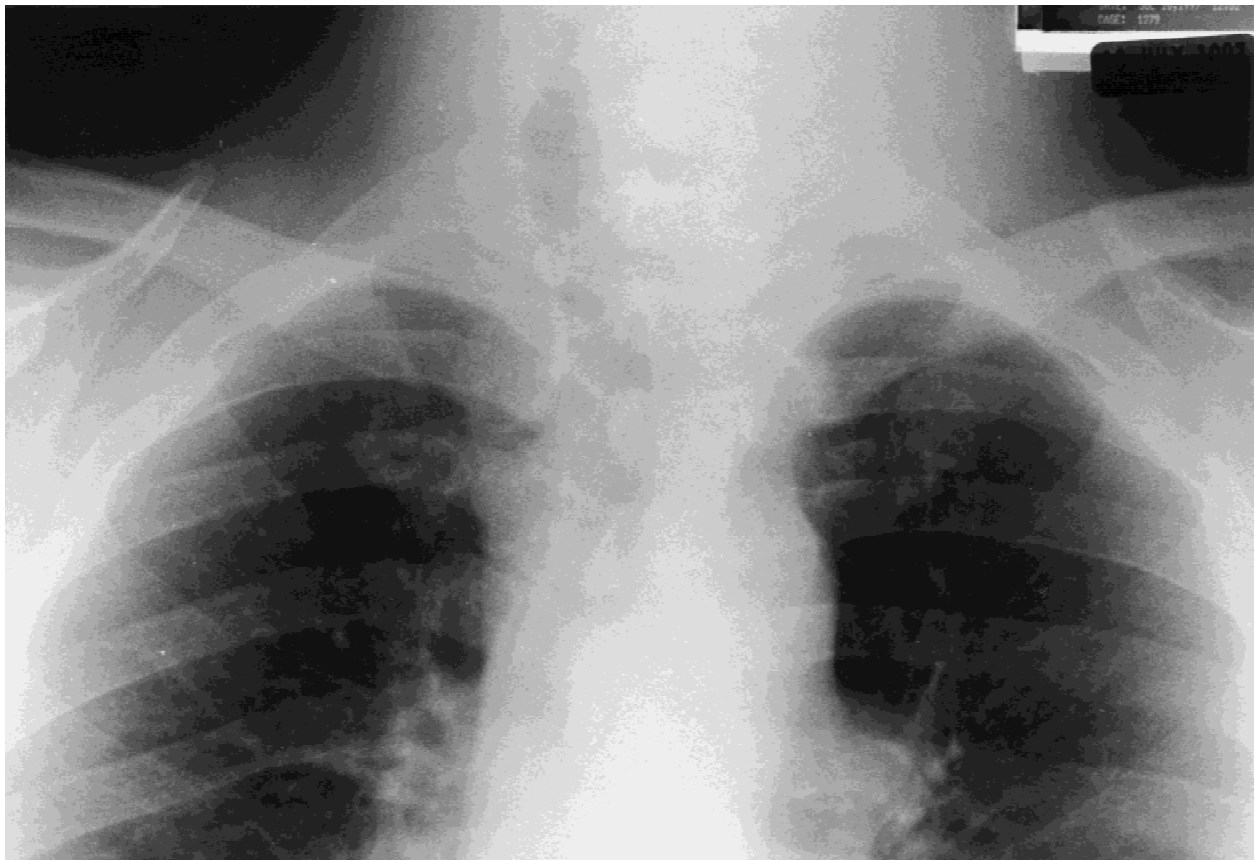


Fig. 1. A 50-year-old morbidly obese man was admitted for a rapidly enlarging left neck mass with compressive symptoms of dysphagia and shortness of breath. Plain X-ray film revealed a deviated trachea toward the right side.

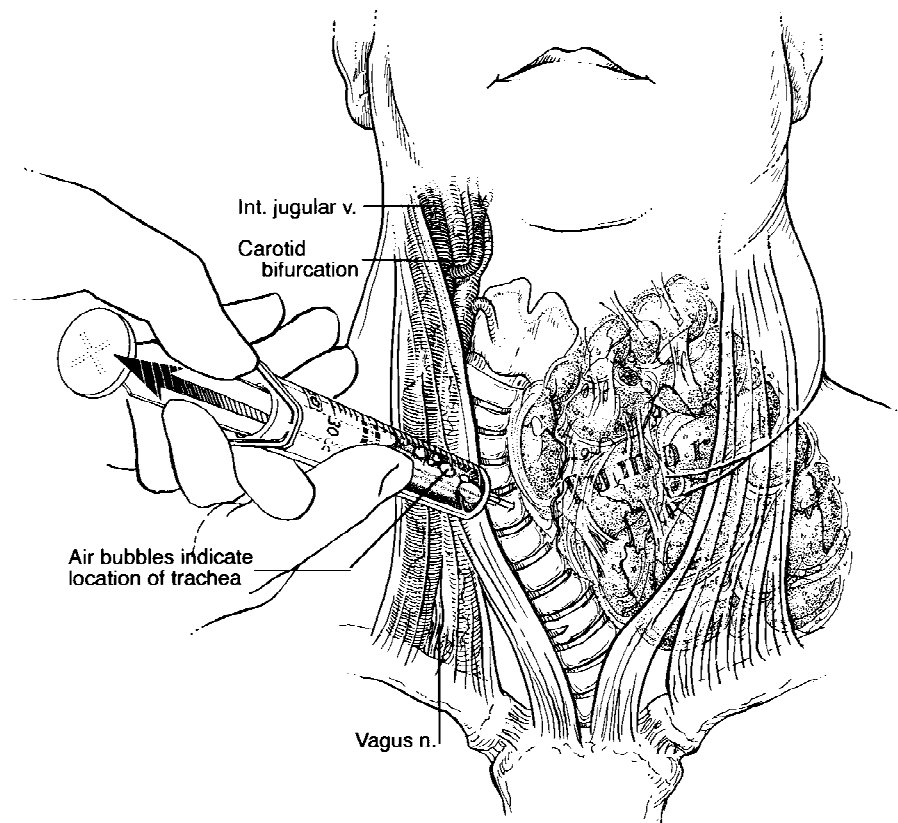


Fig. 2. Technique of emergency tracheostomy for advanced tumor in the neck.



Fig. 3. Emergency tracheostomy was performed using our technique as described. Surgical exploration revealed a primary large B-cell lymphoma of the thyroid. The patient is doing well following radiation and chemotherapy.

a distressed awake patient, even for the most experienced surgeon. The following describes our technique for identifying the trachea in an awake patient requiring emergency tracheostomy from a compressive head and neck tumor.

The patient is placed in a supine position with the neck hyperextended. Palpation of the laryngeal cartilage and trachea is attempted. If normal landmarks are not identifiable, left or right tracheal deviation will be revealed on plain X-ray. Utilizing sterile technique, after local anesthesia, a 23-gauge needle in a syringe filled with

normal saline is inserted inferior to the cricoid process under negative pressure. Aspiration of air bubbles into the syringe is noted as entrance into the trachea. Approximately 2 ml of 1% Lidocaine is then injected into the tracheal lumen. Placement is confirmed by the patient's reflex cough. After identification of the tracheal lumen, tracheostomy can be completed safely.

We believe this procedure to be a safe and effective method of identifying the trachea in patients requiring emergency tracheostomy with compressive symptoms due to enlarging head and neck tumors.